

Aiken County sues over Yucca Mountain decision

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Feb 21--AIKEN -- Aiken County officials have filed suit against the federal government over its decision to abandon plans for a nuclear waste disposal site in Nevada.

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia on Friday, County Councilman Scott Singer said Saturday.

The county is seeking a temporary restraining order to block plans to terminate the Yucca Mountain disposal site.

At one point, more than 4,000 metric tons of waste from Savannah River Site were to be shipped to Yucca Mountain.

President Obama's 2011 budget does not include funding for the Yucca Mountain project, which has been on the drawing board for more than 25 years.

"The county's actually taking the lead on this," Singer said. "The governor is with us on this, the lieutenant governor, Congressman (**Joe**) **Wilson** and others. We just couldn't afford to wait."

Singer said all nine county council members were in agreement on the lawsuit, which he said is unusual.

"I've never seen all nine members as resolute in their conviction," he said. "You couldn't typically get all nine to agree that it is a nice day."

Singer, a Republican, said he is confident South Carolina Attorney General Henry McMaster will also eventually take action on behalf of the state.

County Councilman Willar Hightower, a Democrat, said he does not believe the move to close Yucca Mountain is for political gain, as some Republicans have alleged. Nevada is the home state of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat who is said to be facing a tough re-election fight this year.

Whatever the reason for the decision, Hightower said, he does not want the nuclear waste to remain in Aiken County.

"It's ridiculous that we've spent the money we've spent for (Yucca Mountain) not to be the depository," he said. "It only makes sense."

State Sen. Greg Ryberg, R-Aiken, believes the Obama administration's decision is politically motivated.

"We have 30 years of science and probably millions of man-hours and woman-hours that have gone into the science of Yucca Mountain as a permanent depository," he said Tuesday. "We probably have 10 minutes in a poll that decided it wasn't good for the sitting majority leader for Yucca Mountain to be pursued."

Associated Press and Morris News Service reports were used in this story.

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